

Commissioner Deborah A. Gist's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, March 30, 2012

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From the U.S. Department of Education:

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YMCA to host [Healthy Kids](#) breakfast

Action Item Calendar

April 6: Survey on [professional-development plans](#) due
April 13: Deadline for submitting to RIDE [district Teacher of the Year](#) selections
April 20: Estimates of 2012-13 [first-year teachers](#) due
April 27: Recommendations for [Educator Talent Pool](#) due
May 1: Asset Protection Plans due (see below)
June 8: Data collection for PARCC Technology Readiness Tool due (see below)
June 30: Schools and districts submit [final personnel assignments](#)
July 15: Deadline for final reporting of [evaluation ratings](#)

Note: Commissioner Gist encourages you to share this field memo with your curriculum director and with your principals.

Notes from Commissioner Gist:

RIDE committed to maintaining integrity of state assessments

As you may have seen or heard in news reports this week, the Atlanta Journal Constitution published a report called “Cheating our Children,” which grew out of an investigation of a significant cheating scandal in the Atlanta schools. The report includes an analysis of test-score patterns on state assessments in 69,000 schools in 49 states.

The analysis “flags” school districts in which test scores varied to an unusual degree from one year to the next. The analysis found, among all school districts in Rhode Island over the past four years, only four instances in which there were unusual variations in test scores. In each instance, the variation was either a single-year event or not part of a consistent pattern of variations.

Despite the sensational headlines, we are not cheating the children of Rhode Island.

I have full confidence in the honesty and integrity of our educators and our students. We have in place detailed procedures for training teachers and school leaders in proper administration of state assessments. Our testing protocols also include procedures for reporting irregularities in test administration. RIDE investigates all such irregularities, as well as any unusual patterns of test scores. Thankfully, findings regarding testing violations are extremely rare.

Every year, Rhode Island teachers and school leaders administer more than 200,000 state assessments, encompassing students in every school in Rhode Island. Our state assessments provide all of us with valuable information about the performance of our schools and about the achievement of our students.

State assessments will continue to be an essential tool to help us improve teaching and learning across the state, and my staff members and I will continue to work with you and your colleagues to ensure that our assessment system remains uncompromised.

Rhode Island to move forward with educator evaluations

As we move forward together toward transforming education in Rhode Island, there is no doubt that all of us are experiencing many changes in the way we do our work. Teachers and school leaders across Rhode Island are engaged in transformative work on many fronts, including transitioning to the Common Core State Standards, preparing for the new PARCC state assessments, adopting innovative instructional practices such as digital learning, and implementing educator evaluations, which are currently under way in all schools in our state.

Concerned about the challenges that these initiatives entail, the leadership of one of the state teachers' unions, NEA-RI, has called on us to slow down the pace of school reform in Rhode Island. Specifically, the union leadership has asked us to phase in educator evaluations gradually over at least the next three years. We cannot afford to do so.

Educator evaluations are a vital component in our strategic plan, *Transforming Education in Rhode Island*, and in our Race to the Top initiative as well. The highest priority under our strategic plan and Race to the Top is to ensure that we have excellent teachers in every classroom and excellent leaders in every school. Evaluations are an essential tool by which we measure effectiveness – and, more importantly, evaluations provide us with information we can use to support professional growth and development.

Under our evaluation system, all teachers and school leaders receive evaluations that we base on three components: observations of professional practice, fulfillment of professional responsibilities, and evidence of student growth and achievement. One purpose of the evaluation process is to guide school leaders regarding personnel decisions so that hiring, assignment, promotion, and retention decisions are based on the qualifications of our educators and the needs of our students. The primary purpose of the evaluations, however, is to provide all educators with high-quality, detailed feedback and information about their work that will help improve teaching and learning in every school and classroom, every year.

We developed the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System with input and guidance from teams of teachers and school leaders. During this current school year, as schools are implementing evaluations through a gradual phase-in process, we are learning from experiences and observations across the state to prepare for full, statewide implementation during the coming school year. Throughout the year, we have been engaged in streamlining the process, improving opportunities for professional development, and providing clarity regarding expectations. We will continue to learn about the evaluation process every year, modifying and improving the system as appropriate.

All of us are well aware that implementing a new evaluation system on a statewide scale is a challenging process. I am confident that, as we continue to work together, we can make improvements that will address concerns teachers have raised while maintain the aspects of the evaluation system that so many school leaders and teachers have enthusiastically received. I commend educators across the state for their professionalism and their commitment to this initiative.

From RIDE:

Asset Protection Plans for current fiscal year due May 1 – Action Item

Please see this note from our Office of Statewide Efficiencies:

Districts are required to provide annual Asset Protection Plans, pursuant to the School Construction Regulations. RIDE is pleased to announce that the collection of Asset Protection Plans will now occur electronically. The automation of this process will improve accuracy and allow for greater ease in completing the forms. This information

will be used as part our Statewide Facility Assessment; therefore, the accuracy of this information is critical.

To submit plans, business managers or other authorized users should log in to eRIDE. If you do not have an eRIDE account or are unable to access the Asset Protection Plan link, please e-mail Joseph da Silva, at Joseph.daSilva@ride.ri.gov. Once logged in to eRIDE, you will see an Asset Protection Plan icon located at the bottom of your screen. For your convenience, a user manual has been provided at the bottom of the page.

If necessary, RIDE will conduct an Asset Protection webinar.

Asset Protection Plans for the current fiscal year (2012) are due by **May 1**.

PARCC Technology Readiness Tool opens Monday for LEA input – *Action Item*

Please see the following message from our Office of Data, Analysis, and Research:

As you may know, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) has contracted with Pearson to develop a Technology Readiness Tool to support states' planning as they transition to next-generation assessments to be launched beginning in 2014. This new open-source tool assesses current capacity and compares that with the technology that will be needed to administer the new online assessments in four areas: devices, device-to-tester ratio, network infrastructure, and staff and personnel. The first of six data-collection windows will be from **Monday** (April 2) through June 8. Results and Indicators will be available beginning April 9. Data collection will occur once each spring and fall through 2014.

LEAs are required to provide school-level data to populate the tool. The results of the tool, which will be available at the school, district, state, and consortium level beginning April 9, will be based upon the data entered into the tool. The goal of the first data-collection window is to collect easily accessible baseline data.

To date, LEAs were responsible to complete the following tasks in support of this effort:

- Complete a "USER" spreadsheet to receive an e-mail from the Technology Readiness Tool system that includes the user name and instructions for setting a password to gain access to the tool: Several LEAs have not yet provided the "USER" spreadsheet. Access to the tool is not possible until the LEA users have been input. Another copy of the spreadsheet can be obtained from michael.ferry@ride.ri.gov.
- View the Online Training Module: The online training is available, at www.TechReadiness.org/TrainingModule. The training will give step-by-step instructions for using the tool.
- Review the User's Guide: A guide to assist you as you use the tool is available, at www.TechReadiness.org/UsersGuide.

- Review the FAQs (if necessary): An FAQ document is posted, at www.TechReadiness.org/FAQS.

Log on to www.TechReadiness.org between Monday (April 2) and June 8 to access and use the tool. Please enter information about each school's devices, test-takers, network infrastructure, and staff and personnel readiness, according to the instructions in the training and the User's Guide.

To be included in summary reports, personnel at local education agencies must enter data prior to the end of the day on **June 8**.

If you need additional assistance, please contact Michael Ferry, at 222-8258 or michael.ferry@ride.ri.gov.

RIDE posts guidance on certification for ESL, bilingual, dual-language educators, educators in charters

Please see this message from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

With the implementation of the new certification regulations last January 1, RIDE has published several guidance documents detailing with how the new certification regulations affect various groups of educators (e.g., currently certified educators, prospective educators, middle-grades educators). We have recently posted two additional guidance documents – one regarding certification for educators working in charter public schools and one regarding ESL and Bilingual and Dual Language Certification. Both documents describe the implementation of the regulations and how the new certification regulations affect these educators. These and additional guidance documents can be viewed at the following web page:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/CertificationRedesign/Default.aspx>

Please direct any questions to Andre Audette (andre.audette@ride.ri.gov, 222-5103), in the Office of Educator Quality and Certification.

Reminder: RIDE asks LEAs to complete survey on professional-development plans by April 6

Please see the following request from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

On March 13, RIDE hosted a webinar to discuss professional-development planning related to our new initiatives on interim assessments, formative assessments, data use, the Instructional Management System, and other topics. As you may know, in addition to the professional development associated with Educator Evaluation and Study of the Standards, there is additional training associated with the new technology-based systems that we are about to launch. In order to begin scheduling the professional-development opportunities, we are requesting that each LEA complete the survey at the link below by **April 6**, indicating your intended plans for professional development regarding these new initiatives.

Please click on the link below to view the PowerPoint presentation and webinar recording.

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/assessment/DivisionUpdates.aspx>

Please click on this link to access the survey:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/PD_Offerings_Follow-up_Survey

RIDE to recruit educators in mathematics, ELA for Interim Assessments Item Review Committee

Please see the following announcement from our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum:

Through the Race to the Top Initiative, RIDE is developing Interim Assessments in ELA and mathematics for grades 3 through 11. As part of the development process, classroom teachers and other educators are invited to participate in the Interim Assessments item review process as part of an Item Review Committee (IRC). During this process, IRC members will review assessment items developed to align with the Common Core State Standards in either mathematics or ELA.

The IRC members will review the assessment items using an online system, and they can participate on their own time. A minimum stipend of \$150 will be provided. There will be two IRC opportunities: the first will occur in May and the second will occur in August. Educators can assist in one or both of the opportunities. For the specific dates, requirements, and application materials, please visit:

www.ride.ri.gov/Assessment/Interim.aspx.

If you have any questions about the upcoming IRC opportunity, please contact Jessica by email (Jessica.Brown@RIDE.RI.GOV) or phone (222-8253).

RIDE shares a preview of improvements to the Rhode Island Model for teachers

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

RIDE will hold four regional meetings from 4:00 to 6:00 PM on April 9, 10, 24, and 26 to discuss improvements being made to the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System (Rhode Island Model). A two-page document that previews the improvements for the teacher model and outlines what can be expected in version 2.0 of the Rhode Island Model can be found on the RIDE website at:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/EducatorEvaluation/Docs/RI_Model_Refinement_Two-Page.pdf

RIDE to hold regional meetings to discuss refinement of the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System

Please see this notice from our Office of Educator Quality and Certification:

RIDE will hold four regional meetings next month to discuss refinement of the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System (Rhode Island Model) for teachers and building administrators, including the Student Learning Objectives process that applies to all LEAs. At the meetings, representatives from RIDE will discuss the major priorities for revising the Rhode Island Model, including the specific building-administrator and teacher feedback that led to these priorities. The regional meetings are intended for LEA building and district leaders and union leaders, and the meetings will take place from 4 to 6 p.m. on April 9, 10, 24, and 26. Specific locations for the regional meetings will be shared in an upcoming Field Memo. A webinar for teachers that will focus on refinement of the Rhode Island Model is also being planned for the spring.

9th – East Bay Area or Northern - exact location coming soon

10th – East Bay Area or Northern- exact location coming soon

24th – 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. Providence Career & Technical
Academy Auditorium, 91 Fricker Street, Providence, R.I.

26th – 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. – Westerly Middle School Auditorium, 10 Sandy Hill Road,
Westerly, R.I.

From the U.S. Department of Education:

Department expands FAFSA Completion project to include districts with single high schools

Please see this message from Greg Darnieder, Special Assistant and Advisor on the Secretary's Initiative on College Access:

The U.S. Department of Education is pleased to announce an opportunity for your school districts to participate in the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Completion Project. Research indicates that 90 percent of students who complete a FAFSA will enroll in postsecondary education. Through the project, participating districts will have access to FAFSA-completion data and will be able to give students information about how to pursue a college education.

Districts with a single high school are invited to apply no later than **May 1** for the opportunity of being selected through a randomized selection process.

The expansion of the FAFSA Completion Project will include approximately 12 additional participants.

A notice from the Department on participation in the FAFSA Completion Project is posted here:

http://www.ed.gov/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/FAFSA_Completion_Letter.pdf

Other:

YMCA to host Healthy Kids breakfast

The YMCA of Greater Providence is hosting a Healthy Kids Breakfast discussion, “Healthy Kids Learn Better,” on April 26, from 7 – 9 a.m., at the Crowne Plaza, in Warwick. Commissioner Gist will present opening remarks. Others speakers include Lt. Gov Elizabeth Roberts; Dr. Michael Fine, director of the Department of Health; and Elizabeth Burke Bryant, executive director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. For information and registration, see:

<http://ymcagreaterprovidence.org/NewsEvents/ViewArticle/tabid/164/ArticleId/77/YMCA-Hosts-Healthy-Kids-Breakfast-Discussion.aspx>

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx>